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The 'Undertreatment' of Pain in America is Big \$\$\$\$ for the Maker of OxyContin

Marianne Skolek Salem-News.com

"Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it." Adolf Hitler The "undertreatment" of pain in America - a marketing ploy perpetrated by Purdue Pharma, maker of OxyContin and their richly rewarded pain societies

(WICHITA, Kansas) - Over 100 pain management physicians went to Washington, DC this past week in an effort to focus on better tracking of prescription drugs.

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The physicians were lobbying for the award of grants to states to either set up or improve programs to electronically monitor the dispensing of controlled substances. The effort was coordinated to show physicians when patients are obtaining prescriptions for the same medication from different physicians -- commonly referred to as "doctor shopping."

The physicians are lobbying for some \$55 million in funding for the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Act -- initially proposed by a doctors' group. The act calls for awarding grants to states to establish or improve programs to electronically monitor the dispensing of controlled substances, everything from opioids and medical marijuana to steroids and amphetamines.

Though the act was passed unanimously by both houses of Congress in 2005, it has received minimal funding -- something many blame for not only allowing unchecked doctor shopping in the U.S. but also for contributing to an estimated 20,000 deaths each year from prescription drug overdoses.

American Pain Foundation

American Pain Society

Pain Relief Network

Statistics seem to back up the physicians' concerns. A recent report by CNN, citing research from the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, showed hospitalizations for poisoning by prescription opioids, sedatives and tranquilizers jumped an estimated 65 percent from 1999 to 2006.

Park Dietz, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D., forensic consultant and President/founder of Park Dietz & Associates in Newport Beach, California is quoted as saying "It is very simple for drug seekers to go to doctors in different towns, manufacture complaints or find a story that is effective and use that story -- true or not -- to be able to get a prescription for narcotics,"

Their hunt is made even simpler, he added, "if they have been tipped off about which doctors are 'easy' or they happen to stumble on one of the easy ones, who liberally give large quantities of controlled substances with no skepticism."

Where do these drug-seeking doctor shoppers come from? According to Gary Brazina, MD, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon in California, addicts often start out as legitimate patients who want treatment for pain. "Not everybody who is using a lot of pain medication is an addict," said Brazina.

"Unfortunately, a lot of doctors will give so many pain medications to get a patient out of their hair that before you know it, [the patient] is on this pain medication for a year, and then you have a real problem."

Dr. Jayson Hymes, an anesthesiologist and addiction specialist, agrees that doctors share some of the blame.

"The way our health care system has grown and our cultural psyche has developed, we really have a quick fix for everything," said Hymes, medical director of a private group practice in Los Angeles. "We are a pill-taking society, and pain management has become a pill mill.

"No one wants to treat [his] back pain by losing weight and getting more exercise. That's just too damn much work," Hymes continued. "It's much easier and more fun to take a pill."

"They'll give you things you want whether you should have them or not, because if they don't, you'll find somebody else who will, and they'll be out of a job."

In addition to looking for patients who are doctor shopping, authorities are cracking down on any physicians who knowingly participate in their scam, said Steve Cron, a criminal defense attorney from Santa Monica, Calif.

"If you look the other way and give prescriptions to people when you should know there is a problem or you reasonably should have known, then you are facing criminal prosecution," he said. "And you're probably going to wind up in prison."

The Los Angeles Times recently wrote an article about a chronic pain patient suffering for more than a decade. After years of suffering with severe flu-like aches and pains, she finally found some relief — but it didn't come from a pill or a shot -- it came from exercise.

In one study, 30 men and women with chronic low back pain took hatha yoga classes for 12 weeks -- or were part of a control group that had standard care. Those in the yoga group had substantial decreases in pain compared with the control group, which had almost no change. At the end of the study, published in 2009 in the journal *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, the yoga group was also using fewer analgesics and opiates for pain, and reported greater overall improvement in quality of life.

Another study, published this year in *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, found tai chi beneficial for 15 patients with rheumatoid arthritis. After practicing tai chi twice a week for 12 weeks, participants reported less pain and stress, plus more body awareness and confidence in moving.

And a 2003 study in the Journal of Rheumatology found that 43 people with osteoarthritis who completed a 12-week tai chi program had considerably less pain and stiffness in their joints and more abdominal strength and better balance compared with those in a control group that did not do the exercises.

"When pain gets chronic, people do less," says Kathleen Sluka, professor of physical therapy and rehabilitation science at the University of Iowa. "Their muscles get weaker and their bodies get tighter, and they think about pain a lot more. Movement techniques help them relax, make them stronger and reduce stress levels, so maybe they can think about something other than pain for a bit."

So weight loss programs and exercise such as yoga and tai chi as well as acupuncture may be an answer to the epidemic of the "over-prescribing of opioids" throughout the country -- and may be responsible for the pain societies Purdue Pharma keeps fat and financed --- to eat and choke on the words "undertreatment of pain in America."